

HEALTHCARE INTERPRETATIONS TASK FORCE INTERPRETATION

Number: HITF.1998.004

Date: November 24, 1998

Code: NFPA 101, 1997 Edition. Section 1-7.5

NOTE: While this interpretation is rendered based upon the 1997 edition of the Life Safety Code, it should be noted that this interpretation is also applicable to the 1994 Edition of the code.

Background: This section of the Life Safety Code does not specifically address what percentage, if any, of fire drills must be announced or unannounced. This section expects fire drills to be held at both expected and unexpected times but does not specifically require more unannounced drills than announced fire drills.

Recently, JCAHO stated that at least 50% of the fire drills must be unannounced although this requirement is not part of their EC standards. (See Healthcare Fire Protection Newsletter, October 1998, Volume 4, No. 10, page 11 as quoted by Janet McIntyre, spokesperson for the JCAHO). This is their interpretation of section 1-7.5.

Question: Does Section 1-7.5 require that 50% or more of the fire drills conducted be of the unannounced type?

Answer: NO. Each authority having jurisdiction may establish a percentage of unannounced drills as appropriate for the circumstances. For example, JCAHO has recently indicated that at least half of the fire exit drills should be conducted as unannounced drills. Regardless of this, no drill should ever jeopardize the welfare of the patient receiving care.